United Nations A/72/923

General Assembly

Distr.: General
2 July 2018

Original: English

Seventy-second session
Agenda item 114 (d)
Elections to fill vacancies in subsidiary organs and other elections: election of fifteen members of the Human Rights Council

Note verbale dated 29 June 2018 from the Permanent Mission of Iceland to the United Nations addressed to the President of the General Assembly

The Permanent Mission of Iceland to the United Nations presents its compliments to the President of the General Assembly and has the honour to refer to the candidacy of Iceland for the Human Rights Council for the vacant seat to be filled by the Western European and other States for the term expiring on 31 December 2019 at the by-elections to be held during the seventy-second session of the General Assembly.

In accordance with General Assembly resolution 60/251, the Permanent Mission has the further honour to attach a document setting out the voluntary pledges and commitments made by Iceland, reaffirming its commitment to the promotion and protection of all human rights (see annex).

The Permanent Mission would be grateful if the present note and its annex were circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 114 (d).

18-10840 (E) 050718

Please recycle

Annex to the note verbale dated 29 June 2018 from the Permanent Mission of Iceland to the United Nations addressed to the President of the General Assembly

Candidature of Iceland to the Human Rights Council, by-election 2018

Voluntary pledges and commitments pursuant to General Assembly resolution 60/251

1. Human rights are universal and concern everyone, everywhere. They are an integral part of international relations and, although their promotion and protection are the primary responsibility of States, they are not the private matter of each State. Today, there is a more comprehensive understanding than before of the interaction between human rights, sustainable development, peace and security; and stronger emphasis is now placed on the link between human rights, democratic development and the rule of law.

2. On the seventieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Iceland remains fully committed to the promotion and protection of human rights, both at home and abroad. Iceland's long-term objective to ensure that human rights become a reality for all is enshrined in our Constitution. This is further reflected in our legislation, which we continuously amend to pave the way for further progress.

3. Iceland's commitment to human rights is integrated into all areas of our foreign policy and development cooperation. Iceland is a committed advocate of human rights and fundamental freedoms in its bilateral and multilateral relations, including at the United Nations, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the Council of Europe and in other international forums. Iceland further promotes human rights in its external trade relations. In Iceland's international development cooperation, human rights are placed at the core, where they are seen as the foundation for sustainable development, peace and prosperity.

4. Gender equality has long been a priority issue for Iceland in its work for human rights. In promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women, Iceland has focused on women's participation in decision-making, combating discrimination and violence against women, and respect for sexual and reproductive health and rights. For several years, Iceland has placed great emphasis on gender equality and women's empowerment in its strategy for international development cooperation, in which gender equality is both a cross-cutting issue and a stand-alone goal. This applies to education and health, where sexual and reproductive health and rights have been given a central role, as well as to climate change and natural resource management. Gender equality is also at the core of Iceland's strategy to promote the women and peace and security agenda, where the full and meaningful participation of women is emphasized. A special focus has been on engaging men and boys and their crucial role in achieving gender equality.

5. Despite being a small country with a population of 350,000, Iceland contributes to international initiatives for the promotion and protection of human rights, including through its development cooperation. As an example, Iceland is a top donor per capita to the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), the key United Nations agency for the promotion and protection of women's human rights. Iceland also hosts the United Nations University Gender Equality Studies and Training Programme, which facilitates capacity development of professionals and organizations in low- and middle-income countries in the field of gender equality through education and training. When working with its bilateral,

multilateral, civil society and other partners in development cooperation, Iceland consistently promotes the importance of human rights and gender equality for sustainable development. A new draft policy for international development cooperation for 2019–2023 will be considered by the Icelandic Parliament in the third quarter of 2018. There, human rights and gender equality will continue to be front and centre.

6. Iceland is also firmly committed to the mandate of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and believes its work to be fundamental for the promotion and protection of human rights around the world. In line with that commitment, Iceland significantly increased its contribution to OHCHR in 2017 — making Iceland one of the top five donors per capita. In 2018 and 2019, we pledge to further expand on our partnership with OHCHR.

7. Iceland actively promotes: gender equality and the empowerment of women; the rights of the child; action against trafficking in human beings; the protection of human rights while countering terrorism and violent extremism; the elimination of torture, the death penalty and extrajudicial executions; as well as the elimination of all forms of discrimination, including based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

8. Iceland plays a role in calling the attention of the international community to situations of systematic violations of human rights. Iceland participates actively in the universal periodic review and raises the state of human rights issues at the bilateral, regional and international level with the objective of finding ways to improve situations.

9. Iceland is devoted to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the commitment therein to the rule of law, respect for human rights and gender equality, and the integrated approach embedded in the Agenda.

10. Iceland has ratified all major international conventions and agreements on human rights and encourages other States to do the same, and advocates for the full implementation of said conventions and agreements. In addition, since 2012, Iceland has been leading efforts to strengthen the effective functioning of the human rights treaty bodies.

11. Iceland led the intergovernmental process of the General Assembly on strengthening the effective functioning of the human rights treaty bodies from 2012 to 2014. This led to the successful adoption of General Assembly resolution 68/268, which considerably reduced the operational cost of the treaty bodies while significantly expanding their capacity. Together with the other Nordic countries, Iceland has followed up on the successful conclusion of that process by facilitating the adoption of the first General Assembly resolution of its kind addressing the human rights treaty body system as a whole (resolution 71/185). This resolution streamlined the Assembly's work on and approach to the treaty bodies, replacing individual resolutions that focused only on individual treaty bodies.

12. Iceland has extended a standing invitation to all United Nations special rapporteurs and independent experts and has regularly received visits from several rapporteurs. Iceland highly values the opportunities for Member States and other stakeholders to contribute to and benefit from the work and findings of the special procedures and mandate holders.

13. Iceland takes an active and positive role in engaging with international human rights mechanisms and in intergovernmental forums. We are committed to actively engaging in the United Nations human rights system, including sessions of the Human Rights Council and the Third Committee of the General Assembly.

14. As a part of that commitment, Iceland took the chair of the Commission for Social Development during its fifty-sixth session, with a focus on emphasizing the

positive connection between human rights and development, and the importance of addressing inequality in all our efforts to implement the 2030 Agenda.

15. Iceland is also chairing the Third Committee of the General Assembly for the seventy-second session, building on our long-standing engagement in the Committee. This includes partnering with Singapore in the context of the Forum of Small States to try to rationalize the work of the Third Committee and make it more accessible to all, in particular small delegations that may struggle with the workload.

16. Iceland has a history of engaging in the work of the United Nations for the benefit of all, through the numerous engagements mentioned above, as well as facilitating the review of the Economic and Social Council and the counter-terrorism strategy of the United Nations. We believe that effective institutions lead to more efficient implementation and Iceland will bring its experience of improving processes and working methods to the Human Rights Council.

17. In line with the points above, the Government of Iceland believes that it is ready to serve on the Human Rights Council.

1. Iceland's general objectives

18. If elected, Iceland would pursue the following general objectives:

- Promote the realization of all human rights — civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights — on the basis of international human rights law
- Work towards a more efficient and effective Human Rights Council with the primary objective of allowing the Council to fulfil its mandate to strengthen the promotion and protection of human rights around the globe and to address situations of human rights violations
- Safeguard the effective functioning of the universal periodic review process and support efforts to strengthen national implementation and follow-up to its recommendations
- Enhance the engagement between the human rights treaty body system and the Human Rights Council and its mechanisms
- Continue engaging with and promoting the work of national human rights institutions, civil society organizations and other stakeholders, including in the work of the Human Rights Council
- Support and strengthen the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights as an independent voice for those left voiceless
- Promote understanding of the interdependence of development, peace and security, and human rights, including through the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda

2. Iceland's focus

19. Iceland seeks membership in the Human Rights Council to drive action on a broad range of Council activities, and to work cross-regionally and in a spirit of genuine dialogue and cooperation. Some of the issues that Iceland would focus on are:

(a) Gender equality and the empowerment of women

20. Iceland pledges to:

- Continue working on the implementation of its groundbreaking equal pay law and certification programme with the aim of achieving equal pay for work of equal value in Iceland by 2022. Iceland will also promote a multitude of actions

both domestically and internationally to achieve equal pay, including through its work with the International Labour Organization and UN-Women as a part of the Equal Pay International Coalition.

- Contribute actively to the elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls, including physical, sexual, emotional and economic violence, sexual exploitation, female genital mutilation and child, early and forced marriage. This demands a multilayered approach of prevention, protection, prosecution and provision of services. Iceland will continue developing educational programmes to prevent violence against women, while also reviewing the justice system's response in order to build up a stronger justice system that works for women.
- Promote the engagement of men and boys in the achievement of gender equality for the benefit of all. As a part of Iceland's role as a HeforShe champion, we will address gender stereotypes and harmful masculinity, and work to promote the recent groundbreaking text of the Human Rights Council on engaging men and boys in preventing and responding to violence against women and girls.

(b) Children's rights and combating all violence against children

21. Iceland pledges to:

- Continue to support initiatives aimed at eliminating all forms of violence against children, in particular efforts aimed at eliminating sexual exploitation and sexual abuse and harmful practices such as female genital mutilation and child, early and forced marriage.
- Contribute to securing the full rights of children and promoting child-friendly justice systems in the administration of justice. Iceland would promote innovative approaches to securing the best interests of the child in justice systems, while ensuring the principle of due process.
- Promote multi-agency and child-friendly approaches to child protective services. Traumatic childhood experiences can have devastating consequences for the mental and physical health of children. Early detection and appropriate interventions, as well as applying evidence-based procedures aimed at enhancing protective measures are crucial for mitigating such impacts on children.

(c) Respect for the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex individuals

22. Iceland pledges to:

- Continue to advance and advocate the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) individuals. Iceland tops the index when it comes to LGBTI social acceptance, according to a study by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development from 2017. Recently, domestic funding for LGBTI issues has been doubled and an ambitious law on gender identity recognition is in the pipeline.
- Continue to provide and increase support for the historic mandate of the Independent Expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity, as well as the United Nations Free and Equal campaign.
- Contribute to the work of the Equal Rights Coalition, strengthen cooperation between countries in advancing LGBTI rights and share information about how best to advance the human rights and inclusion of LGBTI people worldwide.

(d) Impact of environmental change, including climate change

23. Iceland pledges to:

- Address the serious impact and challenges of environmental change, including climate change, on human rights, and assess the implications of actions taken thus far on the enjoyment of human rights.
- Promote public awareness and participation in environmental decision-making as a means to empower individuals and communities to positively impact their environment and contribute to sustainable development.
- Address the importance of the protection of environmental human rights defenders who increasingly face unprecedented risks and endure grave violations.

(e) Efficient and effective Human Rights Council

24. Iceland pledges to:

- Work towards a more efficient and effective Human Rights Council with the primary objective of allowing the Council to fulfil its mandate to strengthen the promotion and protection of human rights around the globe and to address situations of human rights violations.
- Promote coherence between the Human Rights Council and the Third Committee of the General Assembly by supporting increased dialogue between the two bodies to ensure complementarity in their work.

3. Human rights in Iceland

(a) Mainstreaming of human rights

25. Iceland is committed to the mainstreaming and integration of human rights in all aspects of Icelandic society. The Constitution of Iceland guarantees non-discrimination and is the foundation of our legal system, with the primary goal of protecting all human rights in Iceland.

26. The mainstreaming of human rights has been a long-standing commitment of Iceland. Most recently, an interministerial steering committee was established in 2017 for the mainstreaming of human rights. The committee was founded prior to Iceland's second review under the universal periodic review in 2016. The cooperation established proved successful in coordinating and spurring action for human rights in the run-up to the review. The steering committee is tasked with following up on the recommendations of the review, as well as preparing Iceland's third review in 2021. It also serves as the national mechanism for reporting on and follow-up to the engagement with international and regional human rights mechanisms more broadly, including the human rights treaty bodies and special procedures, in addition to the universal periodic review. The committee is also intended to better facilitate cooperation between ministries that have shared responsibilities when it comes to human rights.

27. In 2007, human rights were integrated into Iceland's foreign policy with the development of an ambitious white paper. Based on its success, work to revise this white paper has begun, and its estimated release will coincide with the seventieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

28. The Government also strives to provide support to civil society organizations, maintaining a constant dialogue with them on human rights issues and challenges. This includes open consultation processes on proposed legislation and the preparation of submissions to the human rights treaty bodies.

(b) Gender equality

29. The Government of Iceland is committed to raising its voice internationally for gender equality, focusing on women's role in sustainable development; women and peace and security; women's human rights, including sexual and reproductive health and rights; ending all forms of violence against women and girls; and gender equality in trade and women's economic empowerment.

30. For nine consecutive years, Iceland has topped the Global Gender Gap Index of the World Economic Forum. Iceland has ratified all major international conventions on women's rights and takes pride in being among the first signatories. The Government of Iceland is fully committed to continuing to strengthen women's rights in Iceland and internationally, with a holistic approach that recognizes the structural nature of women's inequality and takes into account the multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination that women can be subjected to, for example, on grounds of race, class, disability, immigration, status, religion, age, sexual orientation or gender identity.

31. In recent years, more focus has been placed on increasing the participation of men and boys in achieving gender equality. Since 2015, Iceland has been organizing "barbershop" conferences to support the increased participation of men and boys in such work to transform gender stereotypes and attitudes towards gender equality.

32. The conferences have been well received, with over 2,000 participants and enthusiastic engagement from men and boys. In 2017 alone, we organized barbershop conferences at the Council of the Baltic Sea States, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe in Vienna, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization headquarters in Brussels and the Human Rights Council in Geneva, as well as at the United Nations in New York and the Nordic Council of Ministers, in partnership with civil society and the private sector. In cooperation with Promundo and UN-Women and the HeforShe campaign, we developed a toolbox so that others around the world can organize similar events (see http://www.heforshe.org/en/barbershop).

33. In January 2018, the President of Iceland took on the role of UN-Women HeforShe IMPACT Champion to further this work. The focus is on achieving our three HeforShe commitments, which are to ensure equal pay, increase the role and participation of men and boys in achieving gender equality and achieve parity in the media.

(c) Anti-discrimination efforts

34. According to the Constitution of Iceland, everyone shall be equal before the law and enjoy human rights irrespective of sex, religion, opinion, national origin, race, colour, property, birth or other status, and men and women shall enjoy equal rights in all aspects. All laws and regulations are to be construed in accordance with this provision. In addition, various legal provisions prohibit discrimination, for example with respect to gender equality, the rights of patients to health services and the rights of persons with disabilities.

35. Recently, the Parliament adopted a comprehensive anti-discrimination law with the aim of ensuring that no one, irrespective of sex, religion, disability, belief, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation or gender identity, faces discrimination in the labour market. The law also aims to tackle multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination and widen the supervisory and executive role of the Centre for Gender Equality and the scope of the gender equality complaints committee, so that it can review complaints regarding discrimination on the grounds of disability, religion, belief, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation and gender identity, as well as on the grounds of sex, or a combination of these factors.

(d) National human rights institution

36. The Icelandic Human Rights Centre was established in 1994 and serves as Iceland's national human rights institution. Its role is to advance human rights through the promotion of research and education, as well as awareness-raising. The Centre also serves a monitoring role and has commented on both legislative proposals and public policy and provided information to international monitoring bodies on the state of human rights in Iceland. However, the status of the Centre is not based on statutory law and it is funded directly by several ministries on a contractual basis. Consequently, its status does not comply with the Paris Principles.

37. Efforts are under way to address this shortfall and establish a national human rights institution that is compliant with the Paris Principles.

(e) Human rights education

38. Human rights education in Iceland is an integrated, cross-curricular part of school culture and working methods, in accordance with the National Curriculum Guide. The Guide is based on six fundamental pillars: literacy, sustainability, health and welfare, democracy and human rights, equality and creativity.

39. The fundamental pillars are interrelated and interdependent in education and school activities. They are based on the idea that literacy of the diverse symbolism and communication systems of society are prerequisites to active democracy, which can flourish only if every form of equality between individuals and groups in society is supported simultaneously. Human rights can be ensured only by supporting individual health and welfare and by fighting discrimination and every form of violence, including bullying.

40. Education for democracy and human rights is based on critical thinking and reflection on the basic values of society, and relies on cooperation with parties inside and outside the school. Thus, active cooperation is expected from the homes of children and youth concerning sports and youth work. Active cooperation with the local community is one of the key factors of sustainability. It is essential for democratic schools to participate in creating a sustainable society of collective responsibility. In addition, the United Nations Children's Fund in Iceland is working together with schools to integrate education on the Convention on the Rights of the Child into their daily work.

(f) Regional mechanisms for the protection of human rights

41. Iceland is a member of the Council of Europe and has ratified the European Convention on Human Rights and most of its protocols. Iceland has also ratified a number of Council of Europe human rights conventions, most recently the Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention) in 2018, the Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings in 2012, and the Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (Lanzarote Convention) in 2010. By ratifying the European Convention on Human Rights, Iceland has undertaken to comply with the judgments issued by the European Court of Human Rights in cases brought against Iceland. Judgments against Iceland have prompted the payment of compensation to applicants, and in some instances amendments to legislation. The Convention has been incorporated in its entirety into Icelandic law.